



## 2019 Annual Report

# Heritage Commission

[www.historicwethersfield.org](http://www.historicwethersfield.org)



## History and Mission

The Wethersfield Heritage Commission formerly the Tourism Commission has been overseeing tourism efforts in Wethersfield for 20 years. The adopted mission of the Commission is to develop, recommend and coordinate proposals and programs and methods to assist, initiate, encourage and sponsor activities in all fields of culture and the arts for Wethersfield; and to strengthen the local visitor experience, promote business development in Wethersfield, enhance tourism opportunities, and enhance interpretive aspects of the community.

### Programs

In support of this mission the Commission has established several ongoing programs:

- The maintenance of a tourism specific website/internet presence to promote the Historic Wethersfield brand [www.historicwethersfield.org](http://www.historicwethersfield.org)
- Design and distribution of high-quality color print collateral to promote the sites and attractions found in Wethersfield.
- A marketing and media campaign to promote the brand through press releases, newspaper, magazine and television promotions.
- Maintenance of a year-round calendar of events on the website.
- Distribution of a monthly E-Newsletter promoting local events and news.
- Visitor inquiry information packets for distribution to interested potential visitors.
- Partnerships and coordination with State, Regional and local tourism stakeholders.
- Support of special events and projects designed to improve the visitor experience.

## Benefits

Heritage tourism continues to be a growing niche market segments in the travel industry today. People who engage in historic and cultural activities spend more, do more, and stay longer than other types of U.S. travelers.

According to Tourism Economics, one of the world's leading tourism-related research firms, the most recent economic impact study found that tourism in Connecticut generated: \$15.5 billion in business sales supported by traveler spending. \$2.2 billion in tax revenues, including \$960 million in state/local taxes.

The continued development of tourism in Wethersfield will bring more visitors with money to spend in business located along the Silas Deane Highway and Berlin Turnpike as well as in Old Wethersfield. Increased tourism will not only support our local historic sites and museums and increase business, but it will help to reduce future increases in the tax burdens that fall upon our businesses and residential property owners.

## Membership

The Award-Winning Commission consists of the following volunteers representing the following stakeholders:

Julie Lemos -	Chamber of Commerce	Chris Traczyk -	Resident at Large
Kate Sullivan -	Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum	Charles Lyle -	Webb-Deane-Stevens Museum
Judy Keene -	Economic Development & Improvement Commission	Jill Fletcher -	Wethersfield Historical Society
Charles Ford -	Old Wethersfield Shopkeepers Association	Carol Hall -	Alternate
Charles Forsdick -	Resident at Large	Carol Bruce -	Alternate

The Commission receives staff support from Peter Gillespie, Director of Planning and Economic Development.

During 2019, the Commission continued many of its ongoing programs and activities and started several new initiatives. Specifically, the Commission reports on the following accomplishments:

## Media

The Heritage Commission utilizes a variety of strategies to build awareness of Wethersfield's attributes and bring visitors.

- The Historic Wethersfield website continues to be a primary tool to promote the Town to prospective visitors. In 2019 there were over 100,000 visits up significantly from prior years.
- Our webmaster distributes a monthly newsletter promoting upcoming events. This electronic newsletter is sent out to more than 947 contacts and distributed to the Board of Education for distribution in the schools.
- Historic Wethersfield hosts a Facebook page, Instagram, Twitter and a YouTube Channel. These digital media outlets are used to promote events and activity in Wethersfield. Facebook offers a low-cost advertising option to post events on the top of newsfeeds. Heritage Commission has used this option to boost key events resulting in a much larger audience. The

Facebook page has 3,343 followers. Actual touch points increase proportionally as followers share or comment on postings.

- Annually the Heritage Commission looks at ways to advertise and promote the community. Heritage Commission has ads on the Digital Explore Boards in RI, visitor centers on I-95 and other tourist sites such as the Ferry Terminals in New London. CTM Media recorded more than 170,000 views on Wethersfield's "page" on the digital board. Print advertising was done on the CT Visitor Map, and the Greater Hartford Visitor Guide.
- Over 20 stories appeared in various media in 2019 promoting visitation to Wethersfield including: USA Today, Essentially America, Connecticut Magazine, Visit New England, Boston.com and Fox 61. Wethersfield was once again recognized as one the 15 Prettiest Winter Villages in New England.
- The Commission continues to respond to information requests submitted via the website.

## **Brochures/Promotional Material**

- The Commission utilizes rack cards and postcards as its main print collateral. These cost-effective double-sided cards are a quick snapshot of attractions and steer people to our website. The post cards enable the Heritage Commission to respond to requests for information quickly with reduced postage costs.
- We continued our relationship with CTM Media Group to assist with the distribution of more than 50,000 of our rack cards at 234 Hotel and Visitor locations along the Interstate 91 and 95 corridors, I-91 MA Hotels, Mystic Visitor center and I84. CTM uses our rack card as a model for other organizations who are seeking placement of marketing material at visitor centers
- Photo Contest – Tourism has sponsored a photo contest since 2012. The resulting photos taken by talented residents are being used in promotional material, in the town calendar on our website and in social media posts.
- The Commission has printed brochures to accompany the Heritage Walk, Copies are available at the main kiosks as well as the Keeney Center and the Webb Deane Stevens Museum.

## **Visitor Promotions**

Tourism has been hosting regular meetings of a Heritage Stakeholders group. The meetings keep members apprised of individual activities as well as providing a review of upcoming events and programs. The group regularly shares calendars, discusses opportunities for "piggybacking" on events and shared marketing. The Stakeholders have created numerous events:

- The Shopkeepers hosted its first PorchFest in August with plans to continue this annual event.
- Wethersfield Academy for the Arts - - ongoing classes, special weekends and instructors. The Academy works with other stakeholders to create "packages" for out of town/state visitors
- May "encampment" hosted by Webb Deane Stevens and Wethersfield Historical Society. Heirloom market joins in the festivities with a spring festival that included plants, workshops and craft vendors.

- Expanded Fall Halloween offerings including Lantern Tours, Harvest festival, lecture series, WDS' Thanksgiving Dinner in addition to the Annual Scarecrows along Main Street.
- Holidays on Main – the annual ushering in of the Holiday season has quickly become a town favorite in early December.
- Heritage Commission in collaboration with stakeholder partners has half day and full day group tour packages that includes tours at Webb Deane Stevens and Wethersfield Historical Society houses and a lunch option. The tour packages are designed for groups of 10 to 25 visitors

## Special Projects

- Bicycle and Pedestrian Stakeholders – Heritage Commission has two representatives that sit on the Committee which is creating a strategic plan to make Wethersfield and pedestrian and bike friendly community.
- AARP Community Challenge – in partnership with the Bike-Pedestrian committee, the Heritage Committee applied for and received a grant of \$10,000 from AARP. The grant supports the installation of bike racks and benches that will be placed at recreation areas and community gathering places such as the Community Center and Keeney Center.
- CCGP Grant – The Heritage Commission worked with town departments in identifying infrastructure improvements that will make Wethersfield more appealing to visitors and enhance vehicle, bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The town was awarded more than \$300,000.
- Continued membership with the Greater Hartford Convention and Visitors Bureau and designation as a Preserve America community.

## Benchmarks

- Through the combination of all the Commissions media and public relations efforts in 2019 over 1.8 million impressions were generated for potential visitors.

## Outlook for 2020

- Continue to implement recommendations of Old Wethersfield Master Plan.
- Increase low cost – social and digital marketing efforts
- Complete the final phase of the wayfinding signage program.
- Launch of regularly scheduled river cruises leaving from the cove during spring, summer and fall.
- Continued work on creating a more bike and pedestrian friendly community.
- OW Map and Business/Attractions Directory Kiosk

We appreciate the Town Council's continued support of your Heritage Commission and its efforts to promote tourism and generate economic development in Wethersfield